A bill to be entitled

An act relating to ad valorem tax assessments; amending s. 194.011, F.S.; providing that participation in an informal conference is not a prerequisite to administrative or judicial review of property assessments; requiring that a petition before the value adjustment board challenging an ad valorem assessment contain certain information relating to the property and the petitioner; prohibiting the value adjustment board from extending certain deadlines under certain circumstances; requiring that persons representing property owners before the value adjustment board be licensed brokers, appraisers or attorneys; amending s. 194.013, F.S.; revising certain parcel petition filing fees; amending s. 194.015, F.S.; providing an exception to a prohibition against board meetings without counsel being present; amending s. 194.032, F.S.; authorizing rescheduling of board hearings; providing an exception; deleting certain procedural requirements relating to petitioners being heard by the board; amending s. 194.034, F.S.; revising requirements for a written decision; amending s. 194.035, F.S.; authorizing the Department of Revenue to provide certain special magistrate training online; amending s. 194.037, F.S.; revising requirements for disclosure of tax impact notice forms; providing additional notice requirements for clerks; requiring the department to compile a report on the information received from the clerks and post it on its website; amending s. 195.096, F.S.; requiring the department to include

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proceedings of value adjustment boards in certain in-depth reviews; amending s. 192.0105, F.S.; conforming references; authorizing the Department of Revenue to adopt emergency rules; providing an effective date.

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Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

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Section 1. Subsections (2) and (3) of section 194.011, Florida Statutes, are amended to read:

194.011 Assessment notice; objections to assessments.-

- Any taxpayer who objects to the assessment placed on any property taxable to him or her, including the assessment of homestead property at less than just value under s. 193.155(8), may request the property appraiser to informally confer with the taxpayer. Upon receiving the request, the property appraiser, or a member of his or her staff, shall confer with the taxpayer regarding the correctness of the assessment. At this informal conference, the taxpayer shall present those facts considered by the taxpayer to be supportive of the taxpayer's claim for a change in the assessment of the property appraiser. The property appraiser or his or her representative at this conference shall present those facts considered by the property appraiser to be supportive of the correctness of the assessment. However, participation in an informal conference is not nothing herein shall be construed to be a prerequisite to administrative or judicial review of property assessments.
- (3) A petition to the value adjustment board must be in substantially the form prescribed by the department.

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Notwithstanding s. 195.022, a county officer may not refuse to accept a form provided by the department for this purpose if the taxpayer chooses to use it. A petition to the value adjustment board shall describe the property by parcel number and shall be filed as follows:

- (a) The property appraiser shall have available and shall distribute forms prescribed by the Department of Revenue on which the petition shall be made. Such petition shall be sworn to by the petitioner.
- (b) The completed petition shall be filed with the clerk of the value adjustment board of the county. The clerk, who shall acknowledge receipt of the petition thereof and promptly furnish a copy of the petition thereof to the property appraiser.
 - (c) The completed petition shall:
 - 1. Identify the property by parcel number;
- 2. Contain the estimate of the market value of the property on January 1 of the current year, if the petition is challenging the valuation of the property;
- 3. State the approximate time anticipated by the taxpayer to present and argue his or her petition before the board;
- 4. Contain a declaration that the petitioner is the owner of the property or a person having the written consent of the owner to represent the owner; and
 - 5. Be sworn to by the petitioner.
- (d) The petition may be filed, as to valuation issues, at any time during the taxable year on or before the 25th day following the mailing of notice by the property appraiser as

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provided in subsection (1). With respect to an issue involving the denial of an exemption, an agricultural or high-water recharge classification application, an application for classification as historic property used for commercial or certain nonprofit purposes, or a deferral, the petition must be filed at any time during the taxable year on or before the 30th day following the mailing of the notice by the property appraiser under s. 193.461, s. 193.503, s. 193.625, or s. 196.193 or notice by the tax collector under s. 197.253. If the value adjustment board accepts late-filed petitions, the board may not extend the deadlines in s. 194.171(2).

- (e) A condominium association, cooperative association, or any homeowners' association as defined in s. 723.075, with approval of its board of administration or directors, may file with the value adjustment board a single joint petition on behalf of any association members who own parcels of property which the property appraiser determines are substantially similar with respect to location, proximity to amenities, number of rooms, living area, and condition. The condominium association, cooperative association, or homeowners' association as defined in s. 723.075 shall provide the unit owners with notice of its intent to petition the value adjustment board and shall provide at least 20 days for a unit owner to elect, in writing, that his or her unit not be included in the petition.
- (f) An owner of contiguous, undeveloped parcels may file with the value adjustment board a single joint petition if the property appraiser determines such parcels are substantially similar in nature.

- (g) The individual, agent, or legal entity that signs the petition becomes an agent of the taxpayer for the purpose of serving process to obtain personal jurisdiction over the taxpayer for the entire value adjustment board proceedings, including any appeals of a board decision by the property appraiser pursuant to s. 194.036.
- (h) If the person filing a petition or representing the property owner before the value adjustment board receives compensation, the person must be licensed as a broker or appraiser under chapter 475 or be a member of the Florida Bar in good standing.
- Section 2. Subsection (1) of section 194.013, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:
 - 194.013 Filing fees for petitions; disposition; waiver.-
- (1) If so required by resolution of the value adjustment board, a petition filed pursuant to s. 194.011 shall be accompanied by a filing fee to be paid to the clerk of the value adjustment board in an amount determined by the board not to exceed \$15 for each separate parcel of property, real or personal, covered by the petition and subject to appeal.

 However, no such filing fee may be required with respect to an appeal from the disapproval of homestead exemption under s. 196.151 or from the denial of tax deferral under s. 197.253. Only a single filing fee shall be charged under this section as to any particular parcel of property despite the existence of multiple issues and hearings pertaining to such parcel. For joint petitions filed pursuant to s. 194.011(3)(e) or (f), a single filing fee shall be charged. Such fee shall be \$15 for

the first parcel and calculated as the cost of the special magistrate for the time involved in hearing the joint petition and shall not exceed \$5 for each additional per parcel. Said fee is to be proportionately paid by affected parcel owners.

Section 3. Section 194.015, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

194.015 Value adjustment board.—There is hereby created a value adjustment board for each county, which shall consist of two members of the governing body of the county as elected from the membership of the board of said governing body, one of whom shall be elected chairperson, and one member of the school board as elected from the membership of the school board, and two citizen members, one of whom shall be appointed by the governing body of the county and must own homestead property within the county and one of whom must be appointed by the school board and must own a business occupying commercial space located within the school district. A citizen member may not be a member or an employee of any taxing authority, and may not be a person who represents property owners in any administrative or judicial review of property taxes. The members of the board may be temporarily replaced by other members of the respective boards on appointment by their respective chairpersons. Any three members shall constitute a quorum of the board, except that each quorum must include at least one member of said governing board, at least one member of the school board, and at least one citizen member and no meeting of the board shall take place unless a quorum is present. Members of the board may receive such per diem compensation as is allowed by law for state

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employees if both bodies elect to allow such compensation. The clerk of the governing body of the county shall be the clerk of the value adjustment board. The board shall appoint private counsel who has practiced law for over 5 years and who shall receive such compensation as may be established by the board. The private counsel may not represent the property appraiser, the tax collector, any taxing authority, or any property owner in any administrative or judicial review of property taxes. A No meeting of the board may not shall take place unless counsel to the board is present, except for a meeting to appoint or hire counsel. Two-fifths of the expenses of the board shall be borne by the district school board and three-fifths by the district county commission.

Section 4. Subsection (2) of section 194.032, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

194.032 Hearing purposes; timetable.

(2) The clerk of the governing body of the county shall prepare a schedule of appearances before the board based on completed petitions timely filed with him or her. The clerk shall notify each petitioner of the scheduled time of his or her appearance no less than 25 calendar days prior to the day of such scheduled appearance. Upon receipt of this notification, the petitioner shall have the right to reschedule the hearing a single time by submitting to the clerk of the governing body of the county a written request to reschedule, no less than 5 calendar days before the day of the originally scheduled hearing. Additional hearing reschedulings may be made at the discretion of the clerk but may not extend the scheduled end of

proceedings of the value adjustment board. A copy of the property record card containing relevant information used in computing the taxpayer's current assessment shall be included with such notice, if such said card was requested by the taxpayer. Such request shall be made by checking an appropriate box on the petition form. No petitioner shall be required to wait for more than 4 hours from the scheduled time; and, or her petition is not heard in that time, the petitioner may, at his or her option, report to the chairperson of the meeting that he or she intends to leave; and, if he or she is not heard immediately, the petitioner's administrative remedies will be deemed to be exhausted, and he or she may seek further relief as he or she deems appropriate. Failure on three occasions with respect to any single tax year to convene at the scheduled time of meetings of the board shall constitute grounds for removal from office by the Governor for neglect of duties.

Section 5. Subsection (2) of section 194.034, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

194.034 Hearing procedures; rules.—

(2) In each case, except when a <u>petition</u> complaint is withdrawn by the petitioner <u>or when the petitioner or agent</u> <u>fails to appear</u>, the value adjustment board shall render a written decision. All such decisions shall be issued within 20 calendar days of the last day the board is in session under s. 194.032. The decision of the board shall contain findings of fact and conclusions of law and shall include reasons for upholding or overturning the determination of the property appraiser. When a special magistrate has been appointed, the

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recommendations of the special magistrate shall be considered by the board. The clerk, upon issuance of the decisions, shall, on a form provided by the Department of Revenue, notify by firstclass mail each taxpayer, the property appraiser, and the department of the decision of the board.

Section 6. Subsection (3) of section 194.035, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

194.035 Special magistrates; property evaluators.-

- The department shall provide and conduct training for special magistrates at least once each state fiscal year in at least five locations throughout the state or may provide such training online. Such training shall emphasize the department's standard measures of value, including the guidelines for real and tangible personal property. Notwithstanding subsection (1), a person who has 3 years of relevant experience and who has completed the training provided by the department under this subsection may be appointed as a special magistrate. The training shall be open to the public. The department shall charge tuition fees to any person attending this training in an amount sufficient to fund the department's costs to conduct all aspects of the training. The department shall deposit the fees collected into the Certification Program Trust Fund pursuant to s. 195.002(2).
- Section 7. Section 194.037, Florida Statutes, is amended to read: 249
 - 194.037 Disclosure of tax impact.—
- 251 After hearing all petitions, complaints, appeals, and 252 disputes, the clerk shall make public notice of the findings and

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results of the board in at least a quarter-page size advertisement of a standard size or tabloid size newspaper, and the headline shall be in a type no smaller than 18 point. The advertisement shall not be placed in that portion of the newspaper where legal notices and classified advertisements appear. The advertisement shall be published in a newspaper of general paid circulation in the county. The newspaper selected shall be one of general interest and readership in the community, and not one of limited subject matter, pursuant to chapter 50. The headline shall read: TAX IMPACT OF VALUE ADJUSTMENT BOARD. The public notice shall list the members of the value adjustment board and the taxing authorities to which they are elected. The form shall show, in columnar form, for each of the property classes listed under subsection (2), the following information, with appropriate column totals:

- (a) In the first column, the number of parcels for which the board granted exemptions that had been denied or that had not been acted upon by the property appraiser.
- (b) In the second column, the number of parcels for which petitions were filed concerning a property tax exemption.
- (c) In the third column, the number of parcels for which the board considered the petition and reduced the assessment from that made by the property appraiser on the initial assessment roll.
- (d) In the fourth column, the number of parcels for which petitions were filed but not considered by the board because such petitions were withdrawn or the petitioner or agent failed to appear.

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- (e) In the fifth column, the number of parcels for which petitions were filed requesting a change in assessed value, including requested changes in assessment classification.
- (f) In the sixth column, the net change in taxable value from the assessor's initial roll which results from board decisions.
- (g) In the seventh column, the net shift in taxes to parcels not granted relief by the board. The shift shall be computed as the amount shown in column 6 multiplied by the applicable millage rates adopted by the taxing authorities in hearings held pursuant to s. 200.065(2)(d) or adopted by vote of the electors pursuant to s. 9(b) or s. 12, Art. VII of the State Constitution, but without adjustment as authorized pursuant to s. 200.065(6). If for any taxing authority the hearing has not been completed at the time the notice required herein is prepared, the millage rate used shall be that adopted in the hearing held pursuant to s. 200.065(2)(c).
- (2) There must be a line entry in each of the columns described in subsection (1), for each of the following property classes:
- (a) Improved residential property, which must be identified as "Residential."
- (b) Improved commercial property, which must be identified as "Commercial."
- (c) Improved industrial property, utility property, leasehold interests, subsurface rights, and other property not properly attributable to other classes listed in this section, which must be identified as "Industrial and Misc."

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- (d) Agricultural property, which must be identified as "Agricultural."
- (e) High-water recharge property, which must be identified as "High-Water Recharge."
- (f) Historic property used for commercial or certain nonprofit purposes, which shall be identified as "Historic Commercial or Nonprofit."
- (g) Tangible personal property, which must be identified as "Business Machinery and Equipment."
- (h) Vacant land and nonagricultural acreage, which must be identified as "Vacant Lots and Acreage."
- $\underline{(2)}$ (3) The form of the notice, including appropriate narrative and column descriptions, shall be prescribed by department rule and shall be brief and nontechnical to minimize confusion for the average taxpayer.
- (3) The clerk shall submit a copy of the notice to the Department of Revenue. In addition, the clerk shall prepare and submit to the department, on a form provided by the department, the same information contained in the notice for the following property classes: improved residential property, improved commercial property, improved industrial or utility property and other property not properly attributable to other classes listed in this subsection, agricultural property, high-water recharge property, historic property used for commercial or certain nonprofit purposes, tangible personal property, vacant land, and nonagricultural acreage. The department shall prepare a report containing the information provided by each clerk and a statewide compilation of the information. The report shall be

posted on the department's website.

Section 8. Subsection (2) of section 195.096, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

195.096 Review of assessment rolls.-

- (2) The department shall conduct, no less frequently than once every 2 years, an in-depth review of the assessment rolls of each county. The department need not individually study every use-class of property set forth in s. 195.073, but shall at a minimum study the level of assessment in relation to just value of each classification specified in subsection (3). Such in-depth review shall may include proceedings of the value adjustment board and may include the audit or review of procedures used by the counties to appraise property.
- (a) The department shall, at least 30 days prior to the beginning of an in-depth review in any county, notify the property appraiser in the county of the pending review. At the request of the property appraiser, the department shall consult with the property appraiser regarding the classifications and strata to be studied, in order that the review will be useful to the property appraiser in evaluating his or her procedures.
- (b) Every property appraiser whose upcoming roll is subject to an in-depth review shall, if requested by the department on or before January 1, deliver upon completion of the assessment roll a list of the parcel numbers of all parcels that did not appear on the assessment roll of the previous year, indicating the parcel number of the parent parcel from which each new parcel was created or "cut out."
 - (c) In conducting assessment ratio studies, the department

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must use all practicable steps, including stratified statistical and analytical reviews and sale-qualification studies, to maximize the representativeness or statistical reliability of samples of properties in tests of each classification, stratum, or roll made the subject of a ratio study published by it. The department shall document and retain records of the measures of representativeness of the properties studied in compliance with this section. Such documentation must include a record of findings used as the basis for the approval or disapproval of the tax roll in each county pursuant to s. 193.1142. In addition, to the greatest extent practicable, the department shall study assessment roll strata by subclassifications such as value groups and market areas for each classification or stratum to be studied, to maximize the representativeness of ratio study samples. For purposes of this section, the department shall rely primarily on an assessment-to-sales-ratio study in conducting assessment ratio studies in those classifications of property specified in subsection (3) for which there are adequate market sales. The department shall compute the median and the valueweighted mean for each classification or subclassification studied and for the roll as a whole.

- (d) In the conduct of these reviews, the department shall adhere to all standards to which the property appraisers are required to adhere.
- (e) The department and each property appraiser shall cooperate in the conduct of these reviews, and each shall make available to the other all matters and records bearing on the preparation and computation of the reviews. The property

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appraisers shall provide any and all data requested by the department in the conduct of the studies, including electronic data processing tapes. Any and all data and samples developed or obtained by the department in the conduct of the studies shall be confidential and exempt from the provisions of s. 119.07(1) until a presentation of the findings of the study is made to the property appraiser. After the presentation of the findings, the department shall provide any and all data requested by a property appraiser developed or obtained in the conduct of the studies, including tapes. Direct reimbursable costs of providing the data shall be borne by the party who requested it. Copies of existing data or records, whether maintained or required pursuant to law or rule, or data or records otherwise maintained, shall be submitted within 30 days from the date requested, in the case of written or printed information, and within 14 days from the date requested, in the case of computerized information.

(f) Within 120 days following the receipt of a county assessment roll by the executive director of the department pursuant to s. 193.1142(1), or within 10 days after approval of the assessment roll, whichever is later, the department shall complete the review for that county and forward its findings, including a statement of the confidence interval for the median and such other measures as may be appropriate for each classification or subclassification studied and for the roll as a whole, employing a 95-percent level of confidence, and related statistical and analytical details to the Senate and the House of Representatives committees with oversight responsibilities

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for taxation, and the appropriate property appraiser. Upon releasing its findings, the department shall notify the chairperson of the appropriate county commission or the corresponding official under a consolidated charter that the department's findings are available upon request. The department shall, within 90 days after receiving a written request from the chairperson of the appropriate county commission or the corresponding official under a consolidated charter, forward a copy of its findings, including the confidence interval for the median and such other measures of each classification or subclassification studied and for all the roll as a whole, and related statistical and analytical details, to the requesting party.

Section 9. Paragraphs (d) and (g) of subsection (2) of section 192.0105, Florida Statutes, are amended to read:

192.0105 Taxpayer rights.—There is created a Florida
Taxpayer's Bill of Rights for property taxes and assessments to
guarantee that the rights, privacy, and property of the
taxpayers of this state are adequately safeguarded and protected
during tax levy, assessment, collection, and enforcement
processes administered under the revenue laws of this state. The
Taxpayer's Bill of Rights compiles, in one document, brief but
comprehensive statements that summarize the rights and
obligations of the property appraisers, tax collectors, clerks
of the court, local governing boards, the Department of Revenue,
and taxpayers. Additional rights afforded to payors of taxes and
assessments imposed under the revenue laws of this state are
provided in s. 213.015. The rights afforded taxpayers to assure

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that their privacy and property are safeguarded and protected during tax levy, assessment, and collection are available only insofar as they are implemented in other parts of the Florida Statutes or rules of the Department of Revenue. The rights so guaranteed to state taxpayers in the Florida Statutes and the departmental rules include:

- (2) THE RIGHT TO DUE PROCESS.-
- (d) The right to prior notice of the value adjustment board's hearing date and the right to the hearing within 4 hours of scheduled time (see s. 194.032(2)).
- (g) The right to be mailed a timely written decision by the value adjustment board containing findings of fact and conclusions of law and reasons for upholding or overturning the determination of the property appraiser, and the right to advertised notice of all board actions, including appropriate narrative and column descriptions, in brief and nontechnical language (see ss. 194.034(2) and $194.037(2) \frac{(3)}{(3)}$).

Section 10. The executive director of the Department of Revenue is authorized, and all conditions are deemed met, to adopt emergency rules under ss.120.536(1) and 120.54(4), Florida Statutes, for the purpose of implementing this act.

Notwithstanding any other provision of law, such emergency rules shall remain in effect for 6 months after the date of adoption and may be renewed during the pendency of procedures to adopt rules addressing the subject of the emergency rules.

Section 11. This act shall take effect July 1, 2010.